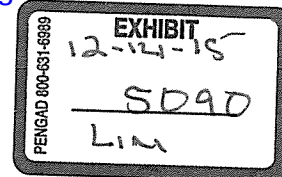


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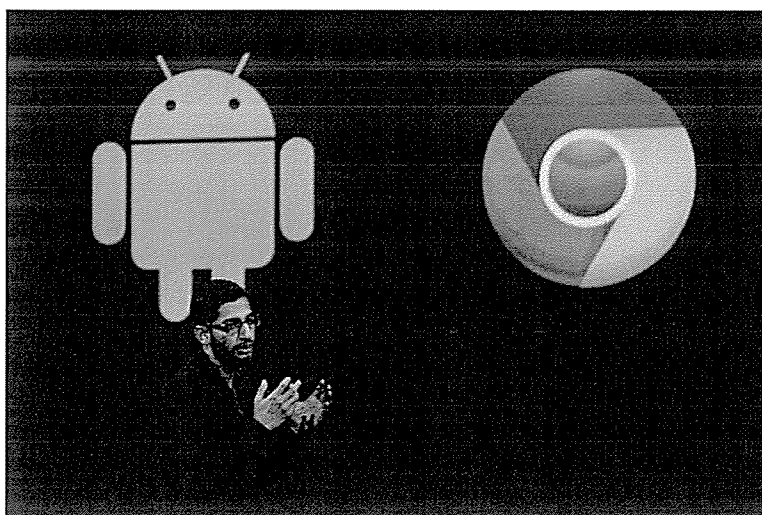
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TECH

Alphabet's Google to Fold Chrome Operating System Into Android

Move is a sign of the growing dominance of mobile computing



Google CEO Sundar Pichai assumed responsibility for Android, as well as Chrome, in 2013. PHOTO: DAVID PAUL MORRIS/BLOOMBERG

By ALISTAIR BARR

Updated Oct. 29, 2015 8:28 p.m. ET

Alphabet Inc. 's Google plans to fold its Chrome operating system for personal computers into its Android mobile operating system, according to people familiar with the matter, a sign of the growing dominance of mobile computing.

Google engineers have been working for roughly two years to combine the operating systems and have made progress recently, two of the people said. The company plans to unveil its new, single operating system in 2017, but expects to show off an early version next year, one of the people said.

Android is the world's most widely used operating system, powering more than one

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billion phones and other devices made by dozens of companies. Chrome powers personal computers, most often laptops, called Chromebooks. They are niche players, accounting for less than 3% of PCs according to research firm IDC.

The move is a long-awaited recognition that the different computing approaches embodied by Android and Chrome are no longer relevant to Google.

Chrome OS was Google's effort to bring the Web and browser-centric experience to more devices, encouraging users to access all software and apps through its Chrome browser on cheap, stripped-down laptops.

Android was an almost retro approach within the company because it focused on devices that only worked when software and apps were downloaded onto them.

Google didn't know which approach would succeed, so it pursued both, and healthy internal debates ensued. But as mobile device and app usage soared, Android prevailed.

The move is also an attempt by Google to get Android running on as many devices as possible to reach as many people as possible. The operating system runs phones, tablets, watches, TVs and car infotainment systems. Adding laptops could increase Android's user base considerably. That should help Google woo more outside developers who want to write apps once and have them work on as many gadgets as possible, with little modification.

The new version of Android will also give PC users access to Google's Play store, which offers more than one million apps, the people familiar with the matter said.

Chromebooks will get a new, as yet undetermined, name, the people familiar with the matter said. Google plans to retain the Chrome name for its Internet browser, which runs on both PCs and mobile devices, they said.

Chrome OS will remain as an open source operating system that other companies can use to make laptops, and Google engineers will continue maintaining it. However, Google's focus will be on extending Android to run on laptops, according to one of the people.

Google Chief Executive Sundar Pichai, who led the development of the Chrome operating system in 2009, told analysts on a call last week that "mobile as a computing paradigm is eventually going to blend with what we think of as desktop today."

Microsoft Corp. adopted a similar approach, creating versions of its Windows 10

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operating system to power PCs and phones, allowing some apps to run on both devices.

By contrast, Apple Inc. maintains distinct operating systems: iOS for smartphones and tablets, and OS X for Mac PCs. Chief Executive Tim Cook said last month that combining them “subtracts from both, and you don’t get the best experience from either.”

There has long been speculation that Google would combine the two operating systems. Mr. Pichai assumed responsibility for Android, as well as Chrome, in 2013, when Android co-founder Andy Rubin moved on to a robotics project. Last year, he named Hiroshi Lockheimer, vice president of engineering for Android, to oversee the Chrome operating system also.

In September, Google unveiled a tablet aimed at the workplace called the Pixel C, which runs on Android. It is the first device in the company’s Pixel line of laptops and tablets to drop the Chrome operating system. Last year, Google made some Android apps available on Chromebooks.

Chrome and Android share a common heritage in Linux open-source software. But they differ in significant ways and combining them won’t be easy, people familiar with the matter said.

Laptops have keyboards and larger screens than mobile devices, so users often use multiple apps simultaneously and transfer content among them. Android smartphones and tablets can run multiple apps, but they can’t be shown on the screen at the same time. That makes it hard for users to jump between apps.

Chromebook users don’t have as many apps to choose from, because app developers have been reluctant to create apps for their small user base.

“Right now we don’t have strong interest in developing for Chrome OS. The market size is relatively small,” said Alex Davis, an engineering manager who works on app development at home-sharing service Airbnb.

Switching to Android is “probably the right move for Google,” Mr. Davis said. “Android is so ubiquitous and so many people are used to using it.”

Folding Chrome into Android also might help Google win more workplace customers for its productivity apps, such as Docs and Sheets, which would run more seamlessly across different devices. As employees do more work on smartphones and tablets, they expect software and documents to be updated on those devices as well as PCs. That is now a

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challenge for Google because of the two operating systems.

—*Daisuke Wakabayashi contributed to this article.*

Write to Alistair Barr at alistair.barr@wsj.com

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